CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-NINTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 20 January 1998, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Norberg (Sweden)

GE.98-60228 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 779th plenary meeting of the Conference and the first part of the 1998 session.

At the outset, I should like to bid a belated farewell to those colleagues who have left the Conference since last September: Ambassadors Sha of China, Nasseri of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Urrutía of Peru, Goonetilleke of Sri Lanka and Le Luong Minh of Viet Nam. I am sure you will join me in requesting their delegations to convey to them our deep appreciation for their valuable contribution to our work during their tenure and our best wishes in their new assignments.

Allow me also to extend a cordial welcome to the new colleagues who have taken up their duties as representatives of their countries to the Conference: Ambassadors Li Changhe of China, Kunadi of India, Khorram of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hayashi of Japan, Majoor of the Netherlands, Voto-Bernales of Peru and Palihakarra of Sri Lanka, and to Mr. Robert Grey of the United States of America, and assure them of our cooperation and support.

I will now make my opening statement as President of the Conference.

It is a great honour for me to assume, on behalf of Sweden, the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I would like to stress that no efforts will be spared on my part in carrying out my duties as President.

First of all, I wish to express my deep gratitude to my predecessor, Ambassador Goonetilleke of Sri Lanka, for the valuable efforts and contribution he made during his presidency. I am also grateful to Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Secretary-General of the CD and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, Deputy Secretary-General of the CD, and all other staff members of the secretariat for their able and indispensable support.

In 1997, one of the most important events in the field of disarmament was the entry into force for the Chemical Weapons Convention. This is, indeed, a source of great satisfaction and inspiration to further multilateral disarmament efforts, in particular to the members of the Conference on Disarmament, where this important Convention was negotiated.

The Chemical Weapons Convention is one of the many outstanding achievements of the CD over the years. It is also an impressive example of what the Conference is able to achieve, when its member States are determined to cooperate, not only for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the whole world community.

It is my sincere hope that the Conference, this year, will be able to start substantive negotiations on other important issues leading to concrete and positive results.

The rules of procedure of the CD provide that the Conference adopts its agenda and establishes its programme of work, on the basis of the agenda, at the beginning of each annual session. I intend to consult with the members of

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the CD in order to reach a consensus on the programme of work as well as on concrete work mechanisms on the individual agenda items. I shall rely on the support and cooperation of all delegations of the CD in performing this duty.

At this stage, there seem to be prospects of emerging consensus on certain issues. However, without the necessary flexibility on the part of all delegations, these possibilities might still elude us. I appeal to all delegations to demonstrate a spirit of cooperation and compromise so that the work of the CD in 1998 proves to be productive.

I should now like to call on Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Secretary-General of the Conference and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to read to us a message addressed to the Conference by Mr. Kofi Annan.

Mr. PETROVSKY (Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations): It is indeed an honour for me to transmit to you the following message of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan. I quote:

"It gives me great pleasure to greet the participants in the Conference on Disarmament as it opens its 1998 session. Less than one year ago I had the privilege of addressing you personally in order to demonstrate the importance I attach to this indispensable forum for multilateral disarmament.

"As you embark on a new round of intensive deliberations, I would like to share with you some of the concerns and expectations of the international community in the field of disarmament.

"The recently concluded fifty-second session of the General Assembly of the United Nations was rightly described as the 'reform Assembly'. Member States and the Secretariat took major strides in the process of revitalization that all agreed was necessary if the United Nations is to lead in the twenty-first century.

"In my programme for reform, I underlined the central importance of disarmament to the global agenda, and that the United Nations has an essential role and primary responsibility in this field.

"While acknowledging the significant progress achieved in recent years to outlaw chemical and biological weapons and to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime, I also pointed to the opportunities afforded by the end of the cold war to make further progress in the area of weapons of mass destruction.

"In this regard, I emphasized that nuclear disarmament must be pursued more vigorously, particularly by nuclear-weapon States, with a view to the progressive reduction and complete elimination of nuclear weapons at the earliest date. At the same time, I expressed serious

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concern at the spread of various types of conventional weapons, especially landmines and small arms, which are extensively used in regional and subregional conflicts.

"I therefore proposed a managerial reorganization of the Secretariat capacities and a new structure to meet the growing challenges in the field of disarmament. I am happy to say that a consensus was reached on the re-establishment of the Department for Disarmament Affairs, and that a distinguished and experienced disarmament expert, Ambassador Dhanapala of Sri Lanka, has agreed to head the Department.

"When I addressed your Conference last year, I welcomed the positive efforts made at bilateral and multilateral levels in the nuclear, chemical and biological fields. Since then, a number of encouraging and indeed historic events have taken place which contributed to further reinforcing these trends.

"This past year, the International Atomic Energy Agency has greatly strengthened its safeguards system within the nuclear non-proliferation treaty regime. The Chemical Weapons Convention has entered into force and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has been established. In the field of biological weapons, the States parties to the Biological Weapons Convention have stepped up their efforts aimed at strengthening the authority of this instrument by developing a verification regime to ensure compliance with its provisions.

"At the Helsinki Summit meeting on 21 March 1997, Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin reached an understanding to begin negotiations, once START II enters into force, on a START III agreement, which would further reduce their strategic nuclear warheads.

"In addition, they agreed on taking a number of steps to improve nuclear security worldwide. The Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty has now been signed by 149 States and ratified by 8 States, and the Preparatory Commission entrusted with the task of establishing the global verification regime of the Treaty is actively engaged in the fulfilment of its mandate.

"With regard to conventional weapons, whose devastating effects are being witnessed every day in regional conflicts, there is a growing awareness among Member States of the urgent need to adopt measures to reduce the transfer of small arms and light weapons. It is now incumbent on all of us to translate this shared awareness into decisive action.

"A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of attending the signing ceremony of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling,

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Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines in Ottawa. On that occasion, I noted that disarmament, now more than ever, was recognized as a vital ingredient in the fulfilment of common security.

"I hailed this Convention as a landmark step in the history of disarmament, and expressed my confidence that it will provide the final impetus for a universal ban, encompassing all mine-producing and mine-affected countries. It is now for your Conference, comprising all relevant States, to play its role in achieving the desired goal of ensuring universal adherence to a total ban on landmines. It is for you, finally, to rid the world of the scourge of anti-personnel landmines.

"Your Conference, as an institution, has served the international community proudly in the past, contributing to the successful negotiation of major global disarmament treaties. Its potential for other multilateral negotiations remains a source of hope and promise for global disarmament.

"Let us seize on the challenges and opportunities of a new era of disarmament to make it as lasting and historic as possible.

"I wish you all a productive and successful session in 1998."

While I have the floor I should like to refer to some organizational aspects of this session.

As you are aware, the Secretariat is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to inform the Conference on the services available to it during its annual sessions. During its 1998 session, the Conference will be allocated 10 meetings per week with full services. In other words, we should be able to hold two daily meetings with full services throughout the whole of the session.

I hardly need to emphasize the seriousness of the financial situation of our organization and, under the current circumstances, it is essential that the Conference makes the best possible use of the resources allocated to it. The Conference has, in the past, shown great flexibility in using the time allocated to it and I am sure that this will also be the case this year. I should like to remind you also that punctuality in starting meetings is very important and that, as usual, meetings with full services cannot be held in the evenings or during weekends.

The situation with regard to documentation in the United Nations continues to be the source of serious concern, and the capacity of the language services is now stretched to its limits. Therefore, the measures already observed by the Conference concerning savings in documentation continue to be valid. In particular, all documents need to be presented well in advance and duplication of documentation should be avoided. In this respect, I should like to once again draw the attention of the Conference to the fact that the United Nations regulations do not permit the issue of

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official documents of the Conference of statements made by delegations in plenary meetings, since they are already part of the verbatim records. I am sure that I can count on your cooperation in exercising every restraint, wherever possible, in the control of documentation.

I would also like to recall that, as part of the Secretariat's efforts to reduce expenditure, the following changes were made in the provision of services to the meeting rooms as of 4 March 1996. Only documents containing draft proposals which require action will be circulated in the meeting room. Pre-session and reference documents will continue to be supplied to the permanent and observer missions. Therefore, delegations are kindly requested to keep the copies they receive throughout the annual session and use them during meetings. Nevertheless, a limited number of documents will be available from the documents distribution counter in room C-111.

I would also like to remind delegations to submit their letters of accreditation as soon as possible so that we may issue passes granting access to the conference rooms, as well as the list of participants. Delegations are kindly requested to carry with them either their CD passes or at least the identification provided by the United Nations Office at Geneva.

The Conference will continue to have at its disposal the Council Chamber, room I, room C-108 and the secretariat conference room on the sixth floor. When delegations need such facilities for their consultations, I would ask that they coordinate their requests through the secretariat.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Mr. Petrovsky for conveying the message from Mr. Kofi Annan and for the information he provided us. I would ask Mr. Petrovsky to convey to the Secretary-General of the United Nations our appreciation for his contribution and the importance he attaches to our work.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations has also sent me a communication transmitting all the resolutions on disarmament and international security matters adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, including those addressing specific requests to the Conference. This communication has been distributed by the secretariat as document CD/1481.

I have on my list of speakers today the representatives of South Africa, Myanmar, New Zealand and the United States of America. Once we have heard the speakers inscribed for today, I intend to invite the Conference to consider, in an informal plenary meeting, the draft agenda for the 1998 session as well as the requests received from States not members of the Conference to participate in our work during this session. These are contained in documents CD/WP.490 and CD/WP.491, which have been circulated by the secretariat. Thereafter, we shall resume the plenary meeting in order to formalize the agreements reached at the informal meeting.

I now invite the representative of South Africa, Ambassador Selebi, to take the floor.

Mr. SELEBI (South Africa): Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the office of President of the Conference on Disarmament, and to use this opportunity to welcome all of our new colleagues to the Conference.

Your presidency comes at a very important juncture of the CD's history. This is especially so given the deadlock which we experienced during last year's session and the sterile debate which characterized our work in 1997. The Conference on Disarmament cannot justify another wasted year. South Africa is fully aware that in the history of the CD, the Conference has gone through periods when it did not take up substantive negotiations. This was, however, in the period of the cold war and, given the changed international circumstances, as well as the very much improved international security situation, this Conference cannot reconcile itself to an extended period of no substantive work.

It is my delegation's view that we should avoid the polemical debate which we entered into at the start of last year's session.

The first order of business which faces us is the adoption of our agenda for 1998. We believe that the best route would be for the Conference to adopt immediately the same agenda, based on the Decalogue, which we adopted last year. The Conference should then turn its attention to reaching an agreement on the work which it will actually do this year. It is imperative that agreement be reached on this in the shortest possible time. The more long-term problems of the improved and effective functioning of the CD and the reform of the Conference's agenda should not be drawn into this phase of our work, but should rather be addressed separately under the guidance of special coordinators. 1997's experience has shown us that the longer we delay a decision, the more entrenched positions become and the more likely we are to enter a dead-end providing us with possible opportunities of interesting but frustrating debate and very little else. My delegation will work actively with you, Mr. President, to avoid such a situation.

All of us sitting in this room know what the real issues are which we are facing and which have a realistic potential for substantive work in the CD. By showing the necessary flexibility, realism and skill in negotiation we will be able to address and find a solution for these issues. If we fail to do so, then the Conference on Disarmament itself is under threat. We do not need to listen very carefully to hear that capitals are frustrated by our lack of productivity, that there is talk of scaling down delegations or that some members are searching to see whether the Ottawa Process model can be applied to other issues. The international community looks around and sees a new and more secure environment which is fertile ground for further disarmament and non-proliferation agreements. The new millennium is almost upon us, and the people of the world are demanding that the next century should provide them with a more secure existence where the threat of annihilation by weapons of mass destruction and the brutal deaths caused by conventional weapons no longer hang over their daily lives. If the Conference on Disarmament, as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international

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community, which has the primary role in substantive negotiations on questions of disarmament, is not responsive to these expectations, then we will all be to blame.

Care should, however, be taken that we do not respond to these expectations by agreeing to do any work so as to create a perception of work. In the run-up to this session of the Conference, my delegation has been approached with several suggestions of packages, the establishment of ad hoc committees, etc. which address issues which are regarded as easy to reach agreement upon. We are not favourably inclined to this approach. For South Africa, the CD has reached a crossroads of relevance. Having learnt from its experience in 1997, the Conference should grasp the challenge which faces it and honestly take up, debate and negotiate the real issues which are of concern to the international community. The task of guiding us successfully through this process has fallen upon your shoulders, Mr. President, because for the Conference to delay addressing its problems through the terms of office of successive Presidents will have the potential of recreating 1997.

What are these "real issues" facing the Conference on Disarmament? In the resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations there was a focus on nuclear disarmament, the prevention of an arms race in outer space, transparency in armaments (TIA), and negative security assurances (NSA).

Nuclear disarmament is considered by all delegations to be one of the most important disarmament issues facing the international community. In fact, as we are all aware, there are many delegations represented in this Conference, members and non-members alike, who regard nuclear disarmament as the priority. We can enter into a polemical debate about whether nuclear disarmament is the only priority or whether there are other priorities such as conventional disarmament, combating the illicit trafficking of small arms, etc. This, however, as in the past, leads us nowhere. The fact of the matter is that this Conference cannot ignore or push the nuclear disarmament issue aside.

As South Africa's delegation to last year's First Committee stated, it is our view that the inability of the CD to reach consensus on a mechanism which would allow for substantive work on the nuclear disarmament issue can be seen as a result of two opposing views. On the one side, there is a refusal to acknowledge the multilateral dimension of nuclear disarmament and a wish to deny the bilateral and plurilateral dimensions of nuclear disarmament. On the other side of the debate there are those who would seek to impose ideological concepts on and "linkages" between the various elements of nuclear disarmament. Last year's impasse should make it clear that the solution for the CD does not lie down on either of these two routes. We believe that the time has come for the States trapped between these two extremes to mobilize their strength and to set an agenda for 1998 which would allow nuclear disarmament to be substantively considered while avoiding the security concerns which are so closely associated with this issue.

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To this end, my delegation is submitting a draft decision and a mandate for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament, a copy of which we have provided to the secretariat with the request that it should be circulated as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament. The draft decision and the mandate reads:

> "The Conference on Disarmament decides to establish an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament to deliberate upon practical steps for systematic and progressive efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons as well as to identify if and when one or more such steps should be the subject of negotiations in the Conference.
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> "In discharging its function, the ad hoc committee will take into account existing proposals and views, as well as future initiatives on nuclear disarmament."

We are laying this mandate before the CD today with the purpose of providing delegations with the opportunity of studying and of reflecting upon its contents. It is South Africa's intention to push this mandate forward for a decision in a plenary meeting of the CD in the near future. This issue is of too great importance for it to be hidden in the morass of CD procedural tactics, where decisions are taken behind closed doors.

We have attempted to draft this initiative carefully, so as not to raise the security concerns which are so closely associated with this issue. We believe that the necessary safeguards to achieve this have been made an intrinsic part of the wording. Nuclear disarmament is of concern to the entire international community. Substantive work in an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament of the Conference on Disarmament would not, and should not, undermine or threaten the nuclear disarmament negotiations between Russia and the United States. These would continue to be of paramount importance to the reduction of nuclear weapons and for their eventual elimination, and so also will future negotiations involving the other nuclear-weapon States.

The General Assembly adopted a resolution on the "prevention of an arms race in outer space" which, inter alia, "invites the Conference on Disarmament to re-examine the mandate contained in its decision of 13 February 1992, with a view to updating it as appropriate, thus providing for the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee during the 1998 session of the Conference on Disarmament". My delegation will work positively and constructively in the debate on a mandate on the outer space issue.

Humanity is faced with a daily threat of harm from use of conventional weapons. These weapons are a source of most of the death and suffering caused in conflicts around the world today, and it is our hope that the Conference will place greater emphasis on such weapons. Of particular concern is the build-up of conventional weapons beyond the level required for self-defence, which is posing a threat to international peace and security. In this regard the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms remains an important tool in building transparency and confidence, which contributes towards easing of tensions and restraint in arms transfers. In accordance with United Nations

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General Assembly resolution 52/38 R on "Transparency in armaments", the Conference should again consider discussing the issue of transparency in armaments. There are, however, divergent views on this subject and there is a need for clearer and more focused proposals on how the CD should address this matter.

On the issue of negative security assurances, my delegation has found it of note that the CD has in the past clearly demonstrated a singular lack of any progress on the security assurances issue. We also question whether this is an issue which truly belongs in the Conference on Disarmament. South Africa's view of security assurances is further that it is not a genuine disarmament measure and that it can, in fact, be viewed as a confirmation of the nuclear-weapon States as those States which possess these weapons.

Since the 1997 first Preparatory Committee meeting for the year 2000 NPT Review Conference, South Africa has adopted the position that the issue of negative security assurances should be dealt with in the context of the NPT's strengthened review process as opposed to any other forum. South Africa sees security assurances as an implicit part of the NPT bargain which was struck with non-nuclear-weapon States (NNWS) when they foreswore the nuclear weapons option, i.e. the right of States which have given up nuclear weapons not to have nuclear weapons used or threatened to be used against them.

Before attempting to reach a conclusion about which of the above-mentioned issues are realistically achievable in the CD this year, my delegation believes that any dispassionate evaluation of the prospects of substantive work needs to be taken against the backdrop of the Conference's rules of procedure, and more specifically taking into account the rule of consensus. Any proposals for substantive work will have to fully take into account the views of all members of the CD. Any mandate for substantive work in the Conference and for the establishment of ad hoc committees will, therefore, by necessity need to be the result of negotiation, flexibility and compromise. If we are to make a serious attempt to break the 1997 deadlock, then all delegations will not only need to carefully consider their own positions but attempt to understand and positively react to the concerns of others. South Africa's appeal is for the members of the Conference on Disarmament to look beyond the issues which divide them, for members not to adopt intractable positions insisting on the inclusion of specific national or group positions before any agreement can be reached, and to negate the re-emergence of maximalist positions which only succeed in retarding global disarmament.

Against this background, it is our view that with this necessary commitment to the goal of genuine disarmament, and taking into account the amount of work which the CD can feasibly undertake in a given year, we should strive for a programme of work which does not attempt to avoid the key issues which face us. After the experiences of last year, the temptation may be great to settle for a programme of work which only includes issues which are regarded as easy to reach agreement upon. It is South Africa's view that as we seek to identify the Conference's work for the future, thereby hopefully also demonstrating the CD's continued relevance as we prepare to enter the

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next century, we cannot avoid openly facing the nuclear disarmament issue. It is furthermore our hope that agreement on the establishment of the ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament will break the "linkages" logjam which has prevented the commencement of the fissile material cut-off (FMCT) negotiations, a commitment which all of the NPT States parties again undertook at the 1997 Preparatory Committee meeting for the year 2000 NPT Review Conference.

Finally, on the institutional aspects of the Conference on Disarmament, we have indicated before that we are of the view that there is a need for reform and renewal. The CD, even with the expansion of its membership, continues to be more reflective of the cold war era than of the current international environment. Its practices and membership do not, in our view, provide it with the necessary capacity to deal with the expectations which face us and will face us in the new millennium. My delegation has on more than one occasion indicated that we believe that the CD should be expanded to include any country which feels that it has a useful contribution to make to our deliberations. The only way in which we are going to achieve truly universal solutions to the issues we are dealing with is to allow universal participation. This concept is well practised in other parts of the United Nations machinery and, indeed, in the context of disarmament negotiations outside this forum. The argument that membership of those who desire it will make negotiations and achieving a consensus in the CD difficult is negated by our own experience in the CD in 1997 and also negated by experience in such forums as the BWC Ad Hoc Group, where progress is being achieved in complex negotiations. There is thus no reason that I can see why we cannot, with the minimum of difficulty, democratize the CD and shape it to meet the new challenges.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of South Africa for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Myanmar, Ambassador Aye.

Mr. AYE (Myanmar): Mr. President, may I first extend to you the warmest congratulations of my delegation on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament at the commencement of the current year? In the many years that you had represented Sweden in Geneva, you had contributed substantially to the work of this Conference. And now once again we comfortably find ourselves in your capable hands to guide the work of the CD with your considerable wealth of experience and diplomatic skills. In this endeavour, I assure you of the fullest cooperation of my delegation.

My delegation would also like to place on record our deepest appreciation for the tireless efforts of your distinguished predecessor, Ambassador Goonetilleke of Sri Lanka, and for his accomplishments during the tenure of his presidency of the CD.

In the recent months past, we had bid fond farewells to so many of our colleagues who had left us. I take this occasion to wish them continuing success in all fields of their future endeavours. They will be remembered for their wide and varied contributions to our work in the Conference as well as

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for the cordial friendships developed and enjoyed by all of us. I have no doubt that this fine tradition of friendship and cooperation will continue to flourish with new colleagues who have joined us since: the Ambassadors of the Netherlands, Japan, the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, Peru, India, Iran, Sri Lanka, the United States of America, and the People's Republic of China. And in so saying, I extend my warmest greetings to them and look forward to benefit from their experience and wisdom.

Looking back at the year past, a great many of us had, without doubt, assessed that it was characterized by doldrums in the substantive part of the CD's work. Nevertheless, 1997 was marked by some encouraging developments in arms control and reduction efforts. With the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention, it must be remembered that it was the Conference on Disarmament which successfully negotiated this complex and difficult Convention, with one of the most stringent verification regimes. And now, with all five permanent members of the Security Council having committed themselves to the Convention, together with well over 100 States ratifying, we have concrete grounds for effective elimination of these weapons of mass destruction.

We also welcome the efforts of the United States and the Russian Federation towards the ratification by the latter of START II as well as towards a timetable to commence negotiations aimed at further cuts in nuclear warheads. Additionally, we appreciate the positive unilateral measures taken by some nuclear-weapon States.

In the area of conventional arms, a treaty to ban anti-personnel landmines was launched through the initiative of Canada and the active participation of a large number of States. My delegation is supportive of all efforts directed at alleviation of humanitarian concerns and banning the export and indiscriminate use of APLs, while at the same time it sees the need to garner wider international support for related efforts by addressing legitimate national defence needs.

May I now focus on our work here in the CD for 1998? In doing so, we need to reflect that the Conference came into being through the collective wisdom of the international community to create a single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament. Hence it has an indispensable role as a natural and legal forum to discuss collective security concerns of all States and to transform them into internationally legally binding instruments. For its part, this Conference had been fulfilling its assigned role with a considerable measure of success.

But the stalemate encountered by the Conference last year is viewed by my delegation as more than unfortunate, and an unwelcome digression from its assigned tasks. We arrive at that stalemate as we had failed to reach consensus on the one single item that should have been accorded priority status in our deliberations, but had instead been ignored or neglected - the central issue of nuclear disarmament. Keeping this undesirable turn of events

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in mind, it would evidently follow that if we are to avoid the shortcomings of the past year, we need to assign nuclear disarmament its proper role in this Conference.

The necessity to demonstrate the political will and give nuclear disarmament fair and proper treatment is not confined to any group within the CD. Indeed, what we are witnersing today is no less than a clarion call by the international community for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. This common call to action encompasses not only United Nations Member States but also non-State entities, prominent jurists and environmentalists; non-governmental organizations; extending even to former military officers of nuclear-weapon States. Support from such a broad spectrum is demonstrative of a collective international plea for nuclear disarmament, especially in light of recent revelations of subcritical nuclear tests to refine and improve existing weapons, or perhaps assist to design new ones.

Those who would maintain that negotiations on nuclear disarmament could best be achieved through bilateral procedures need only reflect on the fact that past record has amply demonstrated time and again that disarmament agreements, be they nuclear or conventional, can be effective and command more widespread acceptance only when they are multilaterally negotiated. This is not to infer that bilateral nuclear agreements are not appreciated. My delegation continues to welcome and encourage bilateral achievements. But they must necessarily be accompanied by successful multilateral negotiations.

It is in this spirit that the Myanmar delegation once again tabled at the last United Nations General Assembly a resolution on nuclear disarmament calling on the CD to establish, on a priority basis, an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament to commence negotiations early this year on a phased programme of nuclear disarmament and for the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons with a time-bound framework through a nuclear weapons convention, a resolution that was subsequently adopted by the General Assembly.

My delegation continues to maintain that this resolution constitutes the optimum basis to achieve the cherished objective of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Yet it may be recalled that supporters of this resolution have on occasion expressed their willingness to be practical and flexible in hopes of advancing the work of the CD, and my delegation is in full accord with such views.

In January of last year, at the first plenary meeting of this Conference, my delegation had suggested a proposal that in the event of our inability to have a separate ad hoc committee, the CD may wish to establish an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament with two working groups, dealing with nuclear disarmament and fissile materials respectively. We may possibly wish to pursue that proposal this year. At the same time it must be emphasized that there exists no intention to "link" one issue with another. The call for nuclear disarmament has existed ever since the first resolution of the United Nations General Assembly as far back as January 1946.

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So to have an auspicious commencement in our work for the current year, we need to arrive at an early consensus on this issue. If some delegations still find it "premature" for substantive negotiations at this stage, many delegations including my own are willing to demonstrate the necessary flexibility to explore various mechanisms that would command consensus. But we must be prepared to address the core issue of nuclear disarmament itself and not non-proliferation measures for which there already exist adequate procedures in progress.

Turning to other items on the agenda, the issues of negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in outer space could be included in our programme of work for this year and have negotiations commence at an early date. Delegations will recall that these two items were thoroughly deliberated in one of the longest ever plenary sessions of the CD last July. The result was that we reached near-consensus to establish two ad hoc committees last year. On NSA, one delegation was not yet ready to take a decision at that time pending a review process on the subject at his headquarters. On outer space, another delegation required time to correct, as it was pointed out, the mandate and the title of the ad hoc committee on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Other than those two pending constraints, my delegation did not recall other notable difficulties to re-establish these ad hoc committees. Given that adequate time has lapsed for delegations to review their positions, it is opportune to look at the issues again with a view to obtain timely consensus in the CD.

The Conference last year appointed special coordinators to conduct consultations on possible mandates for other issues on the agenda. My delegation does not view their appointments as window-dressing measures to disguise the Conference's inability to move forward on substantive negotiations. Rather, we value these genuine efforts as attempts to maximize our time and resources in areas where progress could be made. The special coordinators, despite their appointments late in the year, and the time constraint they encountered, presented valuable and factual reports on respective subjects. My delegation would like to place on record our deep appreciation for the commendable work undertaken by them so far. Taking their reports as a starting point, and due to the limitation of time under which the special coordinators undertook their heavy responsibilities last year, the CD may wish to consider renewing the appointments this year of those special coordinators who are individually prepared to continue to lend their precious time and experience, and to complete the important tasks assigned to them.

In closing, may I again reiterate what my delegation had emphasized from the outset. Nuclear disarmament will continue to be not only the highest priority for a great many of us but also the key to unlocking the difficulties that we continue to encounter at the Conference. Only political will accompanied by the necessary flexibility can move forward the work of the Conference. I have attempted to identify the areas where we could work together to achieve timely results. As always, it is essential that we commence our work early to create the desired momentum for the months ahead. And I would hope that we will be able to make progress taking into account priority and resource considerations both for the Conference and our own delegations.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Myanmar for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand, Ambassador Pearson.

Mr. PEARSON (New Zealand): Mr. President, allow me at the outset to say, that it is good to see in you in the Chair. May I also take this opportunity to convey my best wishes to all colleagues and to the secretariat as we begin a new session of the Conference on Disarmament?

There will be few in this chamber who would question that this is an important moment for the Conference. Our last session could scarcely be regarded as our finest hour. An obsession with tactics, procedure and rigidity led to a meagre result. The problem was not so much the CD as an institution, but the lack of political will.

This year, we must demonstrate some leadership in disarmament. And we have to show that this Conference is still capable of productive engagement on substantive issues. Another year of introspection and procrastination will take us nowhere. This Conference has been conspicuously successful in the past and we believe it is capable of doing so again. We do not see it being consigned to obsolescence.

One of the problems is that the political disarmament agenda is out of step with public expectations. Changing times have heightened expectations that real progress can continue to be made in disarmament. It is our responsibility to redress this imbalance and to rise to the occasion in this chamber.

We support the early adoption of the 1997 agenda and we are ready to seriously consider reforms in the way the Conference works. Above all, however, we want to see an early start on substantive work.

If we are to succeed, we shall need to resist the temptation to draw linkages between options before us. Tactical manoeuvring, in our view, will not take us forward. It is a recipe for procrastination. If there is to be any chance of progress, there will have to be a greater political willingness to entertain movement and compromise.

This Conference needs to remain mindful also of repeated calls for action from the United Nations General Assembly. And, we have to be in step also with the expectations of the international community generally and the people we are here to represent.

I shall want to take the opportunity to comment on the various possibilities before us as our discussions evolve during this new session. I am taking the floor today, however, to comment on one particular issue, nuclear disarmament.

This has consistently been a priority imperative for New Zealand, as it is for many countries inside and outside this chamber.

Debate on nuclear issues in this Conference cannot continue to be suffocated. It is not creditable to repeatedly endorse the need for nuclear

(Mr. Pearson, New Zealand)

disarmament in United Nations resolutions and not to pursue the objective in this forum. This makes little sense to the people we represent. And, it makes no sense in the context of our international obligations and undertakings.

We cannot accept also that the interests of non-nuclear-weapons States should be excluded from contributing to the process of nuclear disarmament. Like it or not, nuclear weapons are multilateral in their intention, reach and potential impact. That gives us the right to call for their progressive elimination and the responsibility to work for that goal.

In 1968, this Conference started work on the Non-Proliferation Treaty. That Treaty places an unequivocal obligation on us to address nuclear disarmament. Its obligations continue to be endorsed in United Nations resolutions. Indeed, the first resolution ever passed in the United Nations General Assembly in 1945 called for the elimination of atomic weapons.

Since then, a series of multilateral instruments - the Partial Test-Ban Treaty, the Anti-Ballistic-Missile Treaty, UNDC declarations and the Protocols to the Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone Treaties - have reinforced this obligation. The nuclear Powers are parties to these treaties. The International Court of Justice, unequivocally, has amplified this obligation.

New Zealand supports the proposal just outlined by our South African colleague to establish an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament. This proposal is realistic and achievable. It does not seek to prescribe how we might proceed. Nor does it attempt to prejudge a mandate. It offers a constructive way forward by calling for an examination of the steps that might be taken along the way to eliminating these weapons.

We cannot accept, in today's world, that it is business as usual on nuclear issues. It is not. Strategies to protect nuclear monopolies, in our view, will not deliver the stability they are supposed to protect. Increasingly, nuclear weapons will become a liability as inventories age and exceed their design life. What will happen then? Will we see a new race for technology replacement?

Nuclear weapons must not become an inevitable feature of our society. The fact that they have not been used for 50 years does not mean that the risks are lessened. The longer we retain them, the greater the temptation of others to acquire them.

New Zealand continues to believe that this Conference should engage in a dialogue on nuclear issues. We do not support time-bound options. Nor do we believe it is productive or realistic to attempt to draw tactical linkages between progress on this issue and progress on other disarmament imperatives.

A mechanism for debate, along the lines being advocated by South Africa, would not threaten the ongoing bilateral process. Those negotiations are hugely important and we support them wholeheartedly. But we continue to maintain that engaging in a debate in this Conference will enhance confidence, add value to the process, and not undermine it.

(Mr. Pearson, New Zealand)

We would urge all delegations to consider the South African initiative on its own merits. An ad hoc committee on nuclear issues would help to build confidence and would strengthen non-proliferation norms. And, perhaps most important, it would demonstrate, in a meaningful way, that the international community and this Conference are capable of living up to their obligations and responsibilities.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of New Zealand for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, Mr. Robert T. Grey.

Mr. GREY (United States of America): Mr. President, first, may I congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency, and assure you of my full cooperation and that of my delegation in your important efforts to begin the Conference's work this year? I would also like to thank you for your warm words of welcome as I take up my duties as the United States representative to the Conference on Disarmament.

I have asked for the floor this morning to deliver to the Conference a statement from the President of the United States upon the occasion of the opening plenary of the 1998 session. The text is as follows:

> "As you resume your critical efforts to strengthen global security, I pledge the full support of the United States delegation in taking the next steps in the nuclear disarmament process and banning anti-personnel landmines from the face of the Earth. No issues are more important today to this body's work than a cut-off of fissile material production for nuclear explosives and a worldwide ban on the export of anti-personnel landmines. If the Conference can promptly conclude these accords, complementing deep bilateral reductions in nuclear arms and the Ottawa Convention, we will take important steps on the road to a world that is free of nuclear weapons and safe for children to tread. I am confident the Conference on Disarmament can meet the challenge."

We all desire to begin work in the Conference as soon as possible on the pressing security issues that confront the international community. I begin my tenure at the head of the United States delegation with the hope that we can quickly resolve our differences and place the practical security concerns of the world's peoples at the forefront of our agenda. At the 1997 session of the United Nations First Committee, we all heard many lamentations about the inability of the Conference to do any work last year as well as fears that the Conference would fade into irrelevance if this situation remained unchanged. President Clinton's statement, which I just read out, points us in the right direction to correct this very unfortunate state of affairs. I hope we can work together to achieve the goals set forth in the statement and to restore the Conference to its rightful place as an effective multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of the United States of America for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil, Ambassador Lafer.

Mr. LAFER (Brazil): Mr. President, let me begin by joining previous speakers in congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency of the CD. Your expediency and resolve in exercising the incumbency since the first day of this year is yet another display of your diplomatic experience and deeply ingrained tact, with both of which this Conference is already well acquainted. Please be assured of my own as well as the Brazilian delegation's full cooperation and support in the discharge of your responsibilities.

I have listened with attention to the important statements delivered here this morning, all of which show the common thread of trying to find ways for the CD to leave behind the deadlock which unfortunately marked its 1997 session.

Of all assessments and conclusions that can be drawn from last year's CD session and from the continued disarmament debate in the General Assembly and other forums, it is clear that nuclear disarmament - this major concern of our time and legitimate aspiration of the international community - remains an essential part of any meaningful and generally acceptable programme for the work of this body, and therefore that an adequate form of addressing this central issue here must be found.

In line with the goals set by the international community in the disarmament field, Brazil continues to attach the highest priority to nuclear disarmament. Accordingly, in past sessions of the CD we have been associated with the Group of 21 in its repeated calls in favour of the immediate establishment of an ad hoc committee for the Conference to deal with this subject. In the same spirit, on 12 June 1997, we joined other G-21 members in putting before the Conference a proposed mandate for an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament. That was document CD/1463. It is regrettable that initiatives such as these were either rejected outright or simply ignored. Nevertheless, as stressed by the Brazilian representative at that time, we shall continue to seek formulas to facilitate reaching the objective of beginning negotiations on nuclear disarmament in the CD. There is no acceptable justification for the continuation of the CD's omission of this fundamental issue.

In this respect, we consider the proposal put forward this morning by the Permanent Representative of South Africa, Ambassador Selebi, in the form of a draft decision whereby the CD would establish an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament, to be a positive and timely initiative. We understand that this carefully worded draft is intended precisely to allow the level of support needed from all quarters in order to break the current logjam and open the way for a true debate on the next steps the CD can and should take in order to address squarely nuclear disarmament. We therefore thank South Africa for its initiative and support its call for this draft to be put to the Conference for decision at the earliest.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Brazil for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Canada, Ambassador Moher.

Mr. MOHER (Canada): Canada will be making a general statement on Thursday of this week, so I will reserve my formalities and welcomes until that time. I wanted briefly just to intervene this morning to welcome the proposal put forward by the South African delegation this morning. We think it is a valuable contribution and one that deserves very, very serious consideration. For its part, Canada is quite prepared to work with that proposal. We also hope that you will be in a position soon to facilitate ongoing consultations to address this issue and to try to find a consensus so that we can move forward positively in that regard.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Canada for his statement. This concludes my list of speakers for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? That does not seem to be the case.

As I announced at the beginning of this meeting, I shall now suspend the plenary and immediately convene an informal meeting open only to members of the Conference in order to consider the draft agenda for the 1998 session and the requests received from non-members to participate in our work. So I would invite the members of the Conference to remain in this room, and the plenary meeting is suspended.

The meeting was suspended at 11.20 a.m. and resumed at 11.35 a.m.

The PRESIDENT: The 779th plenary meeting is resumed. I should like to take up for decision the draft agenda for the 1998 session of the Conference, as contained in document CD/WP.490. May I consider that the Conference decides to adopt this draft agenda?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: In connection with the adoption of the agenda, I, as the President of the Conference, should like to state that it is my understanding that if there is a consensus in the Conference to deal with any issues, they could be dealt with within this agenda.

I should now like to invite the Conference to take a decision on the requests for participation in our work from States not members of the Conference. These requests are contained in document CD/WP.491 and were received from the following States: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Brunei Darussalam, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Gabon, Georgia, Greece, Holy See, Iceland, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Malta, Nepal, Oman, Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Seychelles, Singapore, Slovenia, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Yemen and Zambia.

May I take it that the Conference decides to invite these States to participate in our work in accordance with its rules of procedure?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: This concludes our business for today. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? I recognize the representative of Germany.

Mr. SEIBERT (Germany): Mr. President, let me first congratulate you most warmly on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation is pleased to see you at the helm of this important body. I would also like to thank you for the energy and circumspection with which you have begun your difficult task. You may be assured of the fullest cooperation by the German delegation in achieving an early start of productive work in this Conference.

I should also like to welcome new colleagues who have joined us in this Conference and extend my best wishes to the secretariat.

A first positive step has been taken today by the adoption of the agenda. Compared with the time and effort spent last year to achieve the same result, this marks a better and smoother start, which will, hopefully, allow us to concentrate further discussions on substantive work and arrangements for concrete negotiations in this Conference.

It is in the spirit of compromise and cooperation that Germany has joined the consensus on adopting once again the traditional agenda. Germany continues to believe, however, that this agenda urgently needs updating and reform, a position which, I believe, is shared by most, if not all, delegations in this Conference. The present agenda is overtaken by events. It does not even reflect some of the major topics on which we spent so much time and effort last year, and on which discussions will quite probably concentrate this year again. Germany therefore considers this agenda to be of a provisional nature, and that it can and must be adapted as soon as the Conference has agreed on the main areas of substantive work for this year's session. Germany strongly hopes that all delegations will pursue these discussions in the same spirit of compromise and cooperation and fully supports your commendable efforts to get this Conference off to an early start of productive work.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Germany for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? That does not seem to be the case.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 22 January 1998, at 10 a.m. This meeting stands adjourned.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.